

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Rob Wittman today announced a grant totaling \$1.49 million for the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) acquisition of Catlett Islands. The competitive grant, disbursed by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Association, is awarded as part of the Coastal Zone Management Estuarine Research Reserves.

“The Catlett Islands are an important part of Virginia's Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. These funds will help VIMS continue their excellent work and protect the reserve from any unintentional negative impact from nearby development,” said Wittman.

The Catlett Islands are located less than five miles from VIMS on the North side of the York River in Gloucester County, Virginia. The Catlett Islands Reserve component, on the order of 503 acres in area, consists of multiple parallel ridges of forested wetland hammocks, forested upland hammocks, emergent mesohaline salt marshes and tidal creeks surrounded by shallow subtidal areas.

Ownership of the Catlett Islands has remained within the Catlett family since the late 1700s. In July 2007, the Catlett family sold the islands (minus the Ablowich and VIMS tracts) and the adjacent upland Timberneck Farm property to the development company of Timberneck LLC. Timberneck LLC is currently in the process of developing the property for residential housing and has expressed a willingness to sell the Catlett Islands to VIMS/CBNERRVA. This grant money will be used for a one-time opportunity to purchase the Timberneck LLC holdings on the Catlett Islands prior to sale of individual lots in the abutting Timberneck Farm property.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.